CHILDREN'S MUSEUM NEWS

THE TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART
FOUNDED BY EDWARD DRUMMOND LIBBEY

NO. 11 TOLEDO, OHIO JUNE, 1936

HOW REMBRANDT PAINTED HIMSELF

HAVE you ever tried to draw or paint a picture of yourself? Hold a mirror before your face and look at yourself more carefully than you usually do. Notice what parts of your face are in a strong light; see where the shadows fall. See how round your cheek looks where the light fades into a shadow.

Many artists have painted pictures of themselves. We call these self-portraits. The famous painter, Rembrandt, made over sixty during his long life. One of his first ones now hangs in the Toledo Museum of Art. As you look at it try to discover whether this artist noticed lights and shadows on his own face.

Rembrandt lived about three hundred years ago in the city of Leyden in the Netherlands. His father was a prosperous miller, much respected by the townspeople. Because his family lived near the Rhine river Rembrandt, in later years, signed himself Rembrandt van Rijn, meaning Rembrandt of the Rhine.

From the time that he was a little boy his parents had hoped that he would do outstanding things. When he was fourteen years old they sent him to the University of Leyden. Of course, three hundred years ago not nearly as many children went to school as do today. Perhaps his parents hoped that he would become a lawyer, or a scholar of importance. However, very soon Rembrandt found that the botanical gardens, with their strange and beautiful plants, were far more interesting than Latin. And it is said, he carried home hundreds of sketches which he had made in the gardens when he should have been studying. He begged to be allowed to learn to paint. No doubt his parents were sadly disappointed at this. But finally it was arranged that Rembrandt was to go to work for one of the painters of the town. And while he worked for him he would learn a great many things about painting. Thus as an apprentice a boy learned an art or a trade in those days.

At nineteen years of age he had learned all that a good painter of Leyden and one of Amsterdam could teach him. He had no picture books to look at, and there were few great paintings in the city of Leyden. But Rembrandt had keen eyes. As he wandered along the city streets, or into the country around Leyden, he noticed

REPETITION OF CURVES IN REMBRANDT'S SELF-PORTRAIT

people and nature closely. Often he sketched a landscape and in this way trained himself.

Rembrandt needed to draw and paint people too. Frequently his mother or father or even his sister posed for him in his studio. Rembrandt also found it helpful to study his own face in a mirror. And surely he looked for just such things as you discovered when you looked into your mirror. Rembrandt realized that if he merely painted his features exactly as they were, the face would mean very little. He must paint expression. He practiced long hours drawing laughing faces, sketching sad or weeping faces, faces filled with

horror, or faces with happiness in them. Sometimes he tried to show these expressions in his own face as he drew himself.

Rembrandt knew, too, that a portrait must show the character of the person; that is, it must show what kind of a person one really is, even though he is laughing or frowning. His own portrait tells us that Rembrandt was an earnest, serious, young man; also that he was not handsome but anxious to be truthful even when he painted his own rather plain face.

How carefully he must have dressed himself the day that he planned the picture which now hangs in the Toledo Museum of Art. Perhaps he looked at his reflection from one side and then from the other, until he found that this position was the best. We too can see why he thought this the best. Though young, Rembrandt knew, as all great artists have known, that it was necessary to have his picture arranged in a fine design, as well as to have it look real. See how the gracefully curved plume repeats the line of Rembrandt's shoulders. And the gentler curve of his velvet hat is much the same as the one across his forehead. The handsome gold chain makes the same kind of a curve, but it is placed in a different direction. Look at the reproduction with the design drawn on it in heavy lines. There you will see how the plume and the chain fit together into a long oval shape. The other curves repeat the upper or lower parts of the oval, making a design within it. This is a very simple arrangement, but one which required thought and care in planning.

Have you noticed how beautifully Rembrandt has shown the shiny hardness of the gold chain, and the fluffy softness of the plume? The velvet hat is a different kind of softness, and the flesh still another kind. How smooth and warm the face feels. It is painted with warm colors, too. Rembrandt was always careful to show the depth of space between his figure and the background. Notice how he has used the soft shadows around his head, making the partly lighted face the most important thing in the painting.

When he was a young man Rembrandt painted with greyed green tones. Here the background and the plume are of this color. To relieve the greyed coolness he dressed himself in a deep red-violet hat, and a warmly colored cloak. The warm flesh tones stand out strongly against the cool background. But the shadows on the face have a little of the green in them.

Not all of his life was as happy, nor seemed as successful as these early years. As he grew older and his paintings of light and shadow became finer, buyers failed to recognize how wonderful they were. They seemed to prefer the gayer paintings of the younger artists. Rembrandt received fewer orders. His son and a faithful

servant helped him by selling his pictures. The people of Amsterdam forgot him almost altogether. Today, however, Rembrandt is considered one of the greatest painters of all times.

When you see the picture in the Toledo Museum of Art you too will think him a great artist.

THE Museum was the scene of an unusual activity one bright day early this month when 120 Lincoln School sixth-grade boys and girls chose its dining rooms instead of a park for a picnic. Leather-covered seats and polished tables took the place of park benches, the usual flies and ants were not in evidence, and there was no danger of a sudden shower spoiling the fun. But the more conventional setting had no effect on the gay picnic spirit,—nor did the presence of the teachers of the classes, the principal of the school and the unexpected entrance of the Director of the Museum.

After the group had its art talk and met in the Cloister where each of the boys and girls told what had been enjoyed most during the weekly visits to the Museum throughout the year, the hundred and twenty carrying boxes and bags of various sizes marched to the dining rooms where a surprise awaited them. Each received a bottle of chocolate milk and a box of ice cream, provided by a local dairy.

Proof of the success of the party came in the next few days, when letters written by many of the children arrived at the Museum. Two of them follow:

Dear Miss Anderson:

I wish to thank you for letting us have our picnic at the Art Museum it was lovely. We all had a wonderful time I am sure. I also want to thank you for having us once a week for the whole year it has helped us a lot in History.

Yours truly,
BETTY SMITLEY

Dear Miss Anderson

It was nice of you to ask us to have a picnic in the Art Museum. I hope it did not cause you any trouble. But it was good and I hope everybody liked it as good as I did. I can not think of anything else to write so I will be saying

Yours Truly
GLENN EDWARDS
Mrs. Lindsays Class

P.S. Excuse the mistakes. Please.